

CRITICAL LANGUAGE USAGE
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

by

149

LINDA LEX JURGENSYER

B. S., Kansas State University, 1964

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1967

Approved by:

JM Schell

Major Professor

2D
2668
R4
1967
J951
C.2

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Dr. Leo M. Schell of the College of Education, Kansas State University, for the constructive criticism and advice given in the preparation of this report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Definition of Terms	2
Limitations of the Study	3
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
Importance of Critical Language Usage	4
Nature of Critical Language	6
A Student of Critical Language Usage	13
The Teacher and Critical Language Usage	20
When to Teach Critical Language Usage	27
Approaches to the Teaching of Critical Language Skills	29
Classroom Activities in Critical Language Usage	33
Propaganda Devices Found in Reading Materials	36
Critical Reading and the Basic Readers	43
Tests of Critical Language Usage	44
Research in Critical Language Usage	47
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

INTRODUCTION

Due to changes in society, the needs of young people today include learning to read, think, and listen in greater depth. There has been an increasing awareness that teachers need to recognize the processes involved in depth-reading, depth-thinking, and depth-listening. Once identified, public school systems should plan for the development of these processes in their school program.

The teaching of reading, which involves the teaching of listening and thinking, is necessary in all curriculum areas of the elementary school. However, many teachers consider this teaching of reading skills to be secondary to the teaching of factual information in the content areas. The fundamental skills and abilities are necessary for all reading, but each content area demands additional competencies. These competencies grow out of and are peculiar to the subject matter involved.¹ Classroom teachers need to know what critical skills are needed in each content area and how to develop such skills so that students may derive the greatest possible benefits from their education.

¹I. E. Aaron, "Developing Reading Competencies Through Social Studies and Literature," Reading as an Intellectual Activity, XIII (New York: Scholastic Magazines, 1963), p. 107.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this report was to determine (1) the importance and nature of critical language usage, (2) methods used in teaching critical reading, critical thinking, and critical listening, (3) factors which predispose students to use critical language skills and the qualification of teachers enabling them to teach such skills, (4) skills for critical language usage found in the public school at the present time, and (5) the difficulties to be avoided when applying critical language skills.

Definition of Terms

Critical language. Critical language involves critical reading, critical thinking, critical listening, and critical observation.

Critical reading. Critical reading refers to "the act--simple or complicated--of evaluating and judging printed, informative statements".¹ These statements are absorbed through the reader's visual apparatus.

Critical thinking. Critical thinking is the process of examining both concrete and verbal materials in the light of related objective evidence, comparing the object or statement with some norm or standard, and making a judgment.

¹Paul McKee, Reading: A Program of Instruction for the Elementary School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 377.

Critical listening. This term refers to the evaluation and judgment of informative statements absorbed through aural avenues.

Information. Information refers to factual content.

Concepts. Concepts are abstractions--a selecting out of and putting together again (differentiation and integration) that gives meanings to what is perceived. They are deductions and inferences made from analyses and comparisons.

Generalizations. Generalizations are abstract relationships between concepts.

Interpretation. Interpretation may involve (1) making an inference or drawing a conclusion which is based on, but not expressed, in the statement, (2) thinking an idea which is either an implication or a ramification of what the statement says, and (3) thinking a relationship which, though not expressed in the statement, does exist between what the statement says and some other idea.

Judgment. Judgment refers to the act or process of the mind in comparing informative statements and ideas to find their agreement and disagreement and to ascertain truth.

Limitations of the Study

The broad nature of the topic necessitated that limitations be placed on the study in order that specific aspects of critical language could be investigated. The study was

confined to the elementary grades with emphasis on critical reading. Information for this report was restricted to library research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Importance of Critical Language Usage

Most children live in a world of ideas. From their awakening in the morning until the last parental "good night" they are confronted with ideas through conversation, teaching, books, magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. Children growing up in a democracy are surrounded by controversial topics. Even more important is the fact that as the world shrinks in size and as rapid transportation results in greater social involvement, mass communication will deal with occurrences of national and international importance which will affect the lives and welfare of today's population. With an open mind various points of view need to be assessed, and on the basis of critical analysis, students need to make judgments and decisions that will affect their behavior. Milla Banton Smith has said, "The most imminent danger of mass communication lies in its potency as a molder of public opinion."¹ The guideposts of

¹Milla Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 18.

critical thinking must be given to children so that they can cope with this wealth of information that is available to them; they do not learn to think critically by themselves.

Much of what is learned comes to the reader secondhand through print, radio, film, and television. Most of what is known, therefore, is sifted through someone else's eyes and mind, with someone else's beliefs and biases. There is also a gradual consolidation into the hands of a few publishers a great deal of the material available for reading.¹ The reader must be increasingly critical of what he reads. He needs to be aware of the editorial policy of the publisher and the subtle influence of that policy on his thinking.

The mass media of communication influences us to think and act alike. Conformity, not individuality, is stressed and, since attitudes are learned, students must learn to have a questioning attitude and an attitude for making judgments. This judgment requires a background of experiences and a viewpoint toward mass media which the school can supply. Knowledge and experience are prerequisite to critical language usage in the area in which thinking is to be done.

¹Mass Media and Education, Ch. III, cited by A. Sterl Artley, "Critical Reading in the Content Areas," Elementary English, XLI (February, 1959), p. 122.

processes in that an evaluation must be made by the reader or listener based on previous knowledge, background experiences, the individual's purpose, or certain characteristics of the material.

Many differences in the definitions of critical reading, critical thinking, and critical listening were cited by the various authors. They differed in complexity of thought processes involved and the skills needed by the individual but the element of evaluation was common to them all.

According to Painter, there are three types of thought getting processes. The first type is literal comprehension or "getting the primary meaning from words".¹ The second thought getting process is "getting a deeper meaning from words in addition to simple, literal comprehension".² The third process, critical reading, includes the first two but goes further in involving "personal judgment on and evaluation of the 'quality, the value, the accuracy, and the truthfulness of what is read'".³

The fact that literal and critical reading are not an "either-or" process is stressed by Betts. He writes, "Depth of comprehension is a matter of degree." Literal reading

¹Helen W. Painter, "Critical Reading in the Primary Grades," The Reading Teacher, XIX (October, 1965), p. 35.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

emphasizes the identification and recall of facts and critical reading emphasizes the higher thought processes having to do with selection-rejection of ideas, the relationship between ideas, and the organization of ideas.¹ This points up the fact that critical reading does not begin after the author's ideas have been apprehended, but should be an inherent part of the process of securing them.

This differs somewhat from McKee's definition of critical reading in which he says, "Critical reading may be either an act of immediate analysis based on experience and information already accumulated or a later collecting and applying of the needed information".²

Eller and Wolf have stated that, "Critical reading ability refers to the cluster of skills involved in evaluation of the validity, accuracy, or intellectual (though not artistic) worthwhileness of a unit of printed matter".³

According to Bond and Wagner, the process of critical reading includes evaluating the authenticity and validity

¹Emmett A. Betts, "Guidance in the Critical Interpretation of Language," Elementary English, XXVII (January, 1950), p. 22.

²Paul McKee, Reading: A Program of Instruction for the Elementary School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 403.

³William Eller and Judith Goldman Wolf, "Developing Critical Reading Abilities," Journal of Reading, X (December, 1966), p. 192.

of material and of formulating an opinion about it. The child must understand the meanings implied as well as stated.¹

Logically, critical reading ability should be somewhat dependent upon, or at least related to, general comprehension power because a reader can hardly evaluate what he does not understand literally. Two research studies have been made concerning general comprehension skills and critical reading skills which resulted in differing conclusions, however. In a test devised for fifth grade social studies students, Sochor found that critical reading skills were "practically independent of general comprehension skills".² In a test designed for sixth grade students, Nardelli found that there was a "moderately high relationship between general comprehension ability and skill in critical reading".³ His test included interpreting author's suggestions, interpreting feeling, and recognizing propoganda devices.

Wolf has stated that, "The logical dimension of critical reading has often been neglected in our schools".⁴

¹Guy L. Bond and Eva Bond Wagner, Teaching the Child to Read (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 283.

²Elona E. Sochor, "Literal and Critical Reading in Social Studies," Journal of Experimental Education, XXVII (September, 1956). p. 53.

³Robert R. Nardelli, "Some Aspects of Creative Reading," Journal of Educational Research, L (March, 1957), p. 501.

⁴Willavene Wolf, "Teaching Critical Reading Through Logic," Critical Reading (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 223.

A student with a background in logic would probably not read a biased article without questioning to some degree what he has read. The skills in logic (which include removing the excess words from the argument, making sure the reader has access to all the premises, determining the implied universality of the author's statements, and judging the reliability of the statements)¹ are needed to evaluate informative, argumentative, and persuasive-type materials. After teaching logic to fifth and sixth grade students for two years, Suppes and Binford found that, "Elementary school students who have received prior training in mathematical logic can make rapid progress in other parts of modern mathematics organized on a deductive basis."² The teachers involved in the study were asked to give subjective evaluations as to the general benefits of students attributed to the logic program. The teachers felt that after students had specific training in the use of logic there was some carry-over of critical thinking and attitude into other fields, especially arithmetic, reading, and English.³

¹Willavene Wolf, "Teaching Critical Reading Through Logic," Critical Reading (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 223.

²Patrick Suppes and Frederick Binford, "Experimental Teaching of Mathematical Logic in the Elementary School," The Arithmetic Teacher XIII (March, 1965), p. 195.

³Ibid., pp. 193-94.

Gans has defined critical reading as including the following characteristics: (1) the reader relates the unit of reading to his conversation, problems, and studies; (2) the reader has the ability and awareness of the need to evaluate the sources of material read; (3) the reader has the ability to assess the ways in which words influence ideas; (4) the reader has the ability to select wisely what he reads; and, (5) the reader forms an opinion on what he has read.¹

"Critical reading is not 'criticism' of the author but merely reading with a thoughtful attitude", according to Gainsburg.² He also stated that reflective reading, active reading, interpretive reading, and creative reading are synonymous with critical reading. These skills are related to appreciation because the critical reader derives inferences from the context and makes numerous implications about them. The enriched meaning obtained produces appreciation.³

Despite the slight differences in the definitions of critical reading and critical thinking by reading authorities, most of them agree that skills in making inferences, making judgments, and perceiving relationships should be taught

¹Roma Gans, "Developing Critical Reading as a Basic Skill," Reading in the Secondary Schools (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1961) pp. 232-33.

²Joseph C. Gainsburg, "Critical Reading is Creative Reading and Needs Creative Teaching," The Reading Teacher, XV (December, 1961), p. 185.

³Ibid.

in the public school. This is supported in Williams' study in which she found only these three critical skills common to all ten series of basic readers examined.¹

Huus classified the skills necessary for critical reading into two broad categories--inference and evaluation. The reader makes an inference and evaluates this inference against his experiences and understandings.² The particular reading and thinking skills necessary for critical language usage according to Spache are: (1) investigating sources, (2) recognizing author's purpose, (3) distinguishing fact and opinion, (4) making inferences, (5) forming judgments, and (6) detecting propaganda devices.³ Other writers have included the skills of: appraising the validity of a conclusion,⁴ determining the writer's qualifications,⁵

¹Gertrude Williams, "Provisions for Critical Reading in Basic Readers," Elementary English, XXXVI (May, 1959), p. 328.

²Helen Huus, "Critical and Creative Reading," Critical Reading, Martha L. King, Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf (editors), (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 85.

³George Spache, Toward Better Reading (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Press, 1961), Ch. V, cited by Jeraldine Hill, "Teaching Critical Reading in the Middle Grades," Elementary English, XXXIX (March, 1962), p. 239.

⁴John J. DeBoer, "Teaching Critical Reading," The Elementary English Review, XXIII (October, 1946), p. 252.

⁵Keith K. Flamond, "Critical Reading," New Perspectives in Reading Instruction (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 259.

and judging relevancy of materials to the topic at hand.¹

A Student of Critical Language Usage

Factors which influence critical language usage are found both within readers and reading materials.² The critical reader must have a literal understanding of what is read. He must learn word attack skills in meaningful context for the purpose of all understanding skills in reading. He should have a natural inclination to be skeptical, analytical, and inquiring. And perhaps most important, he should be able to apply critical reading skills which have been specifically taught and developed. These skills are not learned automatically or all at one time.³

A basic factor of critical language usage is the student's broad background of understanding.⁴ This background, which is obtained through reading and practical experience, provides the standards, the criteria, and the

¹John J. DeBoer, "Teaching Critical Reading," The Elementary English Review, XXIII (October, 1946), p. 252.

²Frances Oralind Triggs, "Promoting Growth in Critical Reading," The Reading Teacher, XII (February, 1959), p. 158.

³Ruth K. Flamond, "Critical Reading," New Perspectives in Reading Instruction (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 256.

⁴A. Sterl Artley, "Critical Reading in the Content Areas," Elementary English, XII (February, 1959), p. 125.

facts needed to evaluate critically.¹ DeBoer states that the student's background helps him judge the accuracy and validity of the material read by comparing the material with the facts, principles, and understandings that he has already accumulated. "It involves such questions as: Is the action of this character plausible, is that incident typical, is the author's evident intention justified?"² By reading critically, the reader broadens his background so that other material can be read critically.

Artley says, "There should be a close relationship between intelligence and the ability to do critical reading," because critical reading involves critical thinking and thinking is the process of analysis, judgment, weighing of ideas, and searching out relationships.³ In a study reported by Eller and Wolf, intelligence and critical reading were found to have a .50 to .70 correlation⁴ and Sochor found the correlation between critical reading as she measured

¹A. Sterl Artley, "Critical Reading in the Content Areas," Elementary English, XLI (February, 1959), p. 125.

²John J. DeBoer, "Teaching Critical Reading," The Elementary English Review, XXIII (October, 1946), p. 252.

³Artley, op. cit., p. 123.

⁴William Eller and Judith Goldman Wolf, "Developing Critical Reading Abilities," Journal of Reading, X (December, 1966), p. 192.

it and verbal intelligence to be .69.¹ This indicates that although intelligence makes possible a high level of critical reading, it does not assure it.

The critical reader must know his own biases and, if possible, the prejudices of the author. He must be aware that on every question there may be more than one point of view. He needs a willingness to modify a present viewpoint and be willing to involve himself in the consequences of a fact once he accepts it.² Kemp found that improvement in critical thinking is unlikely in the usual classroom situation and, under favorable conditions, those students with open minds show greater improvement in critical thinking than those with closed minds. The favorable conditions were permissive small group situations in which the usual threats were minimized and in which intensive attention given to the factors in critical thinking was accompanied by extensive practice.³ This indicates that more teacher guidance and planning should be given to critical thinking exercises.

¹E. Elona Sochor, "Literal and Critical Reading in Social Studies," Journal of Experimental Education, XXVII (September, 1958), p. 355.

²Brother William J. Quaintance, "Critical Reading--As if There's Any Other Kind," The Reading Teacher, XX (October, 1966), p. 49.

³C. Gratton Kemp, "Improvement of Critical Thinking in Relation to Open-Closed Belief System," The Journal of Experimental Education, XXXI (March, 1963), p. 323.

An overly critical attitude may handicap the reader and decrease the amount of enjoyment which otherwise might be attained. An unfavorable attitude toward a topic of some personal concern also has a definite limiting effect upon critical reading about that topic as reported in Crossen's study. Crossen found that a positive relationship exists between students' ability to read material critically about minority groups and their attitudes toward these groups.¹ A study by Groff suggests that the reading comprehension of an individual child as he reads is influenced to a degree by his attitude toward the content type of material being read. This seems more likely to be true if he is asked to reason, or to read beyond the material, rather than if he is just asked to repeat verbatim. Differences in attitudes toward reading due to sex characteristics were noted. The girls' attitudes toward manners stories were more highly correlated to critical reading scores than were the boys' reading scores and attitudes for the same passage.²

The reader needs to determine whether he is reading facts or opinions and/or assumptions. A major part of

¹Helen J. Crossen, "Effects of the Attitudes of the Reader Upon Critical Reading Ability," Journal of Educational Research, XLII (December, 1948), p. 298.

²Patricia J. Groff, "Children's Attitudes Toward Reading and Their Critical Reading Abilities in Four Content-Type Materials," Journal of Educational Research, LV (April, 1962), p. 319.

critical reading is sensing the relationships among the facts, comparing the facts with experience, knowing when facts are relevant, evaluating these facts against other facts to arrive at some conclusion, and going beyond the facts to get the inferred, but not explicitly stated meaning.

"Skill in differentiating between fact and opinion can be developed by requiring students to verify or prove their statements."¹ Bamman suggests that this critical reading ability can be developed through experiences that give students practice in perceiving relationships, such as:

(1) comparing sources of information and determining whether the source is original or secondary, (2) locating contradictory accounts and differing points of view expressed by two or more authors, (3) responding in terms of fact or opinion to sets of statements ("The purchase of Alaska was the most beneficial of any land acquisitions by the United States" contrasted with "Alaska entered the Union as the forty-ninth state.")²

The wise reader needs to distinguish the central theme of a selection. To do this, he needs to read for main ideas and details and then be able to distinguish between the main

¹Ruth K. Flemond, "Critical Reading," New Perspectives in Reading Instruction (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 256.

²Henry A. Bamman, Ursula Hogan, and Charles E. Greene, Reading Instruction in our Secondary Schools (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 149-51.

ideas and details. The next step is to "read between the lines" for inferences made by the author.¹ Inferences usually found in narrative selections are concerned with characters, appearances, settings, motives of the characters, their actions, their feelings, anticipations, and the meanings of figurative language. These clues may be recognized in conversations, emotional words, character's actions reported, and forebodings.²

When reading expository material the student needs the ability to define the problem, detect the pertinent information for solution to the problem, and recognize stated and unstated assumptions.³ Efficiency in this type of critical reading will be decreased if students ignore, distort, or omit some of the given data; include additional words and/or ideas; fail to synthesize; or fail to completely evaluate the conclusion.⁴

¹Frances Oralind Triggs, "Promoting Growth in Critical Reading," The Reading Teacher, XII (February, 1959), p. 159.

²Joseph C. Gainsburg, "Critical Reading is Creative Reading and Needs Creative Teaching," The Reading Teacher, XV (December, 1961), p. 192.

³Paul L. Dressel and Lewis B. Mayhew, General Education: Explorations in Evaluation (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1954), pp. 179-81, as cited by C. Gratton Kemp, "Improvement in Critical Thinking in Relation to Open-Closed Belief Systems," The Journal of Experimental Education, XXXI (March, 1963), p. 321.

⁴Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, p. 43, as cited by C. Gratton Kemp, "Improvement in Critical Thinking in Relation to Open-Closed Belief Systems," The Journal of Experimental Education, XXXI (March, 1963), p. 322.

The reader must be able to sense the semantic variation among words. In some manner the word itself must become the symbol for a feeling (and the feeling must be experienced many times before it becomes a meaningful tool of critical reading). He needs the ability to recognize the use of words weighted according to the result desired but not necessarily according to the facts presented, or those which are studiously not presented.¹ Eller states that the semantic equipment needed by the student for maximum comprehension in reading includes an awareness that a given set of words does not have a single meaning, but means different things to different people; that authors write for a variety of purposes; certain propaganda techniques are often used by writers; and the student's understanding of himself and his prejudices.²

According to Eller and Wolf, factors which influence critical reading performance include: (1) intelligence (.50 to .70 correlation), (2) general comprehension ability, (3) social class, (4) age, sex, and test intelligence, and (5) moral and ethical values. They limit these factors by stating, "Critical reading ability cannot be assumed on the

¹Frances Oraland Triggs, "Promoting Growth in Critical Reading," The Reading Teacher, XII (February, 1959), pp. 162-63.

²William Eller, "Reading and Semantics," Critical Reading, Martha D. King, Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf (editors), (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), pp. 229-230.

basis of good general or literally reading comprehension. Even if instruction in critical reading has been excellent, a learner cannot be expected to manifest a high level of critical judgment if such judgment would place him in opposition to views of peer groups or if he lacks confidence in himself. Because so many factors influence the evaluative thinking processes, nobody is an ideal critical reader at all times or in all subjects."¹

The Teacher and Critical Language Usage

Critical language usage requires teaching techniques to develop interpretational skills which are not attained merely by wide reading. The teacher, by means of the procedures he employs, strongly influences the reading skills needed and developed in his classes. Even when critical reading skills are taught--and learned--by formal lessons, these skills may not be applied by students in practical reading situations. (Transfer may or may not take place due to the specialized knowledge and skills needed in specific content areas.) Therefore, teachers should provide opportunities for students to utilize their critical abilities in problematic situations in the content field.²

¹William Eller and Judith Goldman Wolf, "Developing Critical Reading Abilities," Journal of Reading, X (December, 1966), pp. 192-96.

²Ibid.

"The teacher must be able to read critically, must value an inquiring attitude, and be ready to foster the kinds of discussions which reflect differing views."¹ He can learn to do this by applying to his own reading the techniques of critical reading that he presents to his students. Many of the teacher's manuals for basal readers have critical skills which should be assimilated by the teacher. Perhaps, college methods courses in language arts could contribute to this field by having a unit on critical reading skills which apply to both the teacher and the student. Method courses in the various content fields should include units on the critical skills which apply to that particular area. College professors can help students preparing for the teaching field by exposing them "to excellent and poor research, making comparisons and contrasts, evolving standards for judging research, redesigning published reports to improve them, and offering a great deal of practice in all of these abilities".² The teacher can broaden his background of knowledge and experiences by reading a wide variety of material, observing

¹Helen M. Robinson, "Developing Critical Readers," Critical Reading, Martha L. King, Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf (editors), (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 41.

²Ibid., p. 43.

the world around him, and participating in community programs of a cultural and worthwhile nature.

The teacher should examine his definition of reading because today's definition centers around meaning and understanding rather than the traditional ideas of "books covered" or words read. This higher level of reading is not easily or suddenly acquired and the skills must be taught systematically beginning at the kindergarten level. Students at this level can determine if a story is real or fanciful and understand cause and effect in relation to themselves and events.¹

The teacher must begin by diagnosing the individual needs of the students and clear away any attitude of defeatism which may exist. Students can compensate for their weaknesses by being provided with work in needed skill development. The teacher should then assign a block of knowledge, set of ideas, or material to students according to each student's particular level.² Before the individual begins work on the material assigned, the teacher should provide some form of motivation. This can be done by considering the past experiences of the student, the student's familiarity with the topic, the student's

¹Kathleen B. Hester, "Creative Reading: A Neglected Area," Education, LXXIX (May, 1959), pp. 538-39.

²Constance M. McCullough, "Conditions Favorable to Comprehension," Education, LXX (May, 1959), p. 533.

curiosity, the student's current interests, and the teacher's own enthusiasm. The teacher should also provide help with difficult words and ideas before they are encountered. Prepared study questions and lists of the purposes of the unit will foster critical reading and guide the student beginning work in critical language usage.¹

Critical reading is an evaluative process and, in part, whether the reading material stimulates productive thinking on the part of the reader will depend upon the nature of the material. The teacher can encourage critical reading by selecting more provocative materials and using skillful questions.² Teachers should provide, in every unit of instruction, a wide variety of reading materials at various ability levels, with a wide range of interests, and, if possible, a wide range of viewpoints. To stimulate thinking, he should ask thought-provoking questions as he checks on the comprehension of the material read. He should bring to light the problems encountered by the characters found in stories and probe for possible solutions. Creative activities should be initiated which give pupils opportunities to develop critical reading skills.

¹ Constance M. McCullough, "Conditions Favorable to Comprehension," Education, LXX (May, 1959), p. 533.

² J. P. Guilford, "Frontiers in Thinking that Teachers Should Know About," The Reading Teacher, XIII (February, 1960), p. 176.

Reading proficiency can be accelerated by making students aware of various semantic principles and techniques. In much of the material students read, they must determine the connotative value of words, distinguish between reports and judgments, determine the referent or referents for abstract symbols and recognize logical fallacies and generalizations presented with or without support, and discover the author's purpose.¹ If students possess these skills they will be more critical and will extract more meaning from what they read. A semantic technique that helps students deal with the problem of validity is the distinction between reports and judgments. The teacher should help the student see that a "report" is usually taken to mean any statement that can be proven or disproven using agreed upon systems of measurement.² A "judgment" is a statement that cannot be proven or disproven using such means.³ Another semantic device that helps clarify thinking is the obvious difference between a symbol (word) and its referent (the thing for which the word stands). The more the student knows about the referent, the more meaning the symbol will have.

¹Michael C. Flanigan, "Semantics and Critical Reading," English Journal, LV (September, 1966), p. 714.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

A teacher can cultivate the attitude of looking for meanings in a student's reading experiences. He must see that pupils relate each story or article read, even simple ones, to their daily lives. To have more meaning for the student the material must relate to some personal experience or feeling. The teacher should steer away from traditional questioning of obvious facts and, to be able to ask the right questions, the teacher must be a creative thinker. The students should be prepared for their reading either through oral or written study guides.¹ Later, as a student improves in critical language usage, he should be able to form his own questions as he reads. The questions that are used to aid the student in getting meaning from what he reads should be formed in such a way that the teacher becomes a guide, a clarifier, and an "intellectual agitator" for the student.²

Although critical reading can be done by all students, gifted children seem to enjoy vicarious experiences to a greater extent. The teacher must remember that excessive emphasis on factual material may limit the thinking of the gifted. Both in oral and written expression, the gifted

¹Warren G. Cutts, Modern Reading Instruction (Washington, D. C.: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964), pp. 55-63.

²Walter Petty, "Critical Reading in the Primary Grades," Elementary English, XXXIII (May, 1956), p. 301.

child should be encouraged to express his feelings in exact and interesting ways. The teacher should know "why" a student feels the way he does about articles read and not be satisfied with a "Just because" answer. One distinguishing characteristic of gifted children is their creativity and the teacher must see that these children enjoy the process of reading by providing them with an enriched and stimulating curriculum.¹ It is important for the teacher to remember that a student should not be pushed too rapidly into more advanced reading materials but, at the same time, the student should do wide reading so that he may acquire a broad base upon which to test and which to weigh other related facts.²

Teachers who develop critical language skills within their students will find that these students are more excited and more enthusiastic about reading than they have ever been previously.³ As Gainsburg has said of critical

¹Walter B. Barbe and Thelma E. Williams, "Developing Creative Thinking in Gifted Children Through the Reading Program," The Reading Teacher, XV (December, 1961), p. 198.

²Warren G. Cutts, Modern Reading Instruction (Washington, D. C.: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964), pp. 55-63.

³Kathleen B. Hester, "Creative Reading: A Neglected Area," Education, LXXIX (May, 1959), pp. 528-39.

and creative reading: "The added understandings are well worth the time it takes."¹

When to Teach Critical Language Usage

The use of critical language skills should begin when a student starts to school.² According to Smith, even preschool children are capable of critical thinking before they read.³ They can look at pictures and evaluate them. As they listen to stories being read about familiar topics, they can judge the validity based on background experiences gained since infancy.

Petty strongly feels that critical reading should be taught in the primary grades because any subsequent ability must be built upon a foundation which has already been developed. A continuous, sequential, developmental program which is started early will lead to progressively higher levels of development. Problem-solving situations can be used for this early development because critical thinking occurs in problem-solving situations. Young

¹Joseph C. Gainsburg, "Critical Reading is Creative Reading and Needs Creative Teaching," The Reading Teacher, XV (December, 1963), p. 192.

²A. Sterl Artley, "Critical Reading in the Content Areas," Elementary English, XLI (February, 1959), p. 128.

³Madorad E. Smith, "The Preschool Child's Use of Criticism," pp. 137-41, as cited by Helen M. Robinson, "Developing Critical Readers," Critical Reading (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 41.

children can recognize a problem, think about the different aspects of the problem, decide what actions must be taken, and decide what must be found before the problem can be solved.¹

Shotka states that teachers can help first grade students develop critical thinking by teaching them to: show good judgment; develop reasoning ability; express ideas in general terms as well as concrete terms; express their own ideas of evaluation and appreciation; and develop the ability to make comparisons in terms of something being suitable, appropriate, or accurate.² Students can base their evaluations on pictures, films, simple experiments (science, numbers, etc.), what they have learned at home, traveling, listening to reading done by the teacher, or by the reading of simple books by the student.

Benson states that children in grades one to three can do the following activities to develop critical language skills: (1) read a story to decide if it is real or fanciful; (2) discuss the accuracy of the illustrations in a story; (3) verify the information gained from a story with information obtained on an excursion; (4) select

¹Walter Petty, "Critical Reading in the Primary Grades," Elementary English, XXXIII (May, 1956), pp. 298-300.

²Josephine Shotka, "Critical Thinking in the First Grade," Childhood Education, XXXVI (May, 1960), pp. 406-409.

answers to questions on a worksheet; (5) complete sentences on a worksheet; and, (6) select material pertinent to a topic.¹

Although critical language instruction begins in the primary grades, it should not end there. Critical reading in the content areas begins with emphasis on critical reading in the developmental program; further instruction should be provided by all teachers in all content areas at all levels. "Psychology of learning has long pointed out that what is taught is most effectively learned when it is presented within the context in which it is used."²

Approaches to the Teaching of Critical Language Skills

Children can read and think critically about topics relating to their experiences regardless of the age level. To do so, they must examine the facts presented, note the pertinent facts, note relationships, and make generalizations. These skills can be taught in two ways. Group teaching is perhaps better in the primary grades because the students can profit by the experiences of others. An individualized reading situation is better in the intermediate

¹Josephine Tronsbery Benson, "Creative Reading at All Grade Levels," Critical Reading, Martha L. King, Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf (editors), (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 97.

²A. Sterl Artley, "Critical Reading in the Content Areas," Elementary English, XLI (February, 1959), p. 128.

grades where students are assigned individual projects.¹ For this program to be successful, the teacher must give the students close supervision and guidance. Even when critical reading skills are taught, and learned, by formal lessons, these skills may not be applied by students in practical reading situations. Therefore, the students should have opportunities to utilize their critical abilities in the various content areas. Students with certain characteristics (such as high verbal intelligence) tend to learn critical skills more efficiently than many of their age mates; heterogeneous classes may need to be reorganized according to types of patterns that are used to adjust instruction to individual differences in basic reading abilities. Since so many factors influence the evaluative thinking processes, nobody is an ideal critical reader at all times or in all subjects. Curriculum committees and individual teachers should plan not for mastery, but for continuing development and improvement of critical reading power.²

Huelsman states that there are at least three approaches to critical reading that are in current use. These are the direct approach, the incidental approach, and the functional

¹Russell G. Stauffer, "Children Can Read and Think Critically," Education, LXXX (May, 1960), p. 522.

²William Eller and Judith Goldman Wolf, "Developing Critical Reading Abilities," Journal of Reading, X (December, 1966), p. 196.

approach.¹ In the direct approach, the teacher aims to stimulate independent thinking and develop critical reading skills as opposed to assimilative reading, recreational reading, and fact-finding reading. The teacher's work is planned so that he may directly teach these skills. He should teach methods of logical reasoning, acquaint readers with the errors that may easily be made in reasoning, and the devices used by writers and speakers to influence the reader or listener. Pupils are stimulated to react critically to advertisements, editorials, biased articles, and cartoons. This teaching approach would have to be used in the intermediate grades due to the type of materials used. Although this helps the reader identify pitfalls in critical thinking, there may or may not be transfer to practical situations in other content areas.²

The incidental approach places emphasis upon critical reading in the content fields. This centers around committee or individual work concerned with oral and written reports, special projects, and unit work. Many teachers develop critical skills using this method without realizing it. Students learn to co-ordinate material found in several

¹Charles B. Huelsman, Jr., "Problems Met When Reading Critically in Grades Seven to Ten," Reading in the Secondary Schools (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1961), p. 228.

²Ibid.

sources, how to determine the relevancy of the material read, how to differentiate fact from opinion, and how to determine the logical reasoning that supports opinions.¹ Often, however, critical skills are not emphasized as much as the factual knowledge gained in making the report and they are not always taught in sequence and with continuity.

The functional approach emphasizes the use of all critical language skills. It is a combination of the direct approach and the incidental approach in that critical skills are taught in practical settings but directly and in sequential order from kindergarten through sixth grade and beyond. Emphasis is also placed upon the evaluation of primary source material rather than securing information from secondary works.² This requires the cooperation of all faculty members in determining the scope and sequence of the program. Continuity and flexibility must be incorporated into a good program.³ The functional approach is perhaps the best approach found in schools today but its use is not widespread due to the lack of materials, amount

¹Charles B. Huelsman, Jr., "Problems Met When Reading Critically in Grades Seven to Ten," Reading in the Secondary Schools (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1961), p. 229.

²Helen M. Robinson, "Developing Critical Readers," Critical Reading, Martha L. King, Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf (editors), (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967), p. 43.

³Huelsman, op. cit., p. 231.

of planning involved, teacher cooperation and experience, and administrative guidance.

Classroom Activities in Critical Language Usage

Various teaching techniques may be used to develop the attitude of critical thinking. To introduce the idea of the difference between fact and opinion, a teacher may begin with general statements and have the class determine if these statements can be proven or disproven. The teacher might say, "John has a red cap." The class would agree that this is a fact as compared to, "John's cap is funny", which they will judge as an opinion. This can be followed by discussion of statements in textbooks, magazines, and newspapers. Systematic instruction would lead to discussions of advertisements heard over the radio or seen on television: "Nine out of ten children use White toothpaste," or an advertisement for dog food such as: "Feed Chunky to your dog if he is tired and listless!" followed by two pictures; one picture shows a dog sleeping and the other shows a dog chasing a rabbit. The students should be able to relate these statements to their own background and have some reasons upon which to base their judgments.

A fifth grader giving an oral report in social studies might state that bison lived on the Great Plains at one time. This could very well conflict with the textbook which states that buffalo lived on the Great Plains. Students can use this

situation to refer to reference books to determine which is correct. Were there both buffalo and bison living on the Great Plains? If not, what is the difference between buffalo and bison?

Another exercise is to read two versions of the same news story and let the class describe their different feelings and impressions of the two stories. The teacher can then lead the class to analyze words, phrases, and ideas that created these impressions. Follow-up assignments would be an exercise in writing a summary of information gathered from various sources or the preparation of oral and written reports comparing two or more books or articles.

Determining the general significance of the context can be done by discussing the relationship of the content of one paragraph to that of another paragraph, discussing the relationship of the content of one paragraph to that of an entire section or chapter, and then discussing the relationship of the entire section to the topic at hand.

Primary children can learn to read for deeper meaning by selecting one character and describing his actions from the beginning to the end of the story. They should give reasons, either stated or implied, for each of the character's actions.

Students can learn to evaluate sources of information through questions asked by the teacher, such as: "Did the person who told you this know that it was true? What makes

you think that he knew?"¹ The teacher should develop with the class criteria such as author's background, position, experience with the subject, and date of publication for determining competency of the author.² Exercises used to develop this skill include developing an idea with the students and having them find relevant and irrelevant information and valid and invalid information concerning the idea. Students can select several non-fiction trade books in specific areas and discuss whether the author's writing should be accepted or not by applying what they know about the author and by comparing the facts stated in the book with facts stated in reference books'.

McKee states that readers should turn to a biographical dictionary such as Who's Who in America or American Men of Science, a card catalogue, or the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature to determine the background of knowledge on a certain topic which a writer possesses. The biographical dictionary should be used to determine the extent the writer has worked on a particular topic. The card catalogue and Reader's Guide can be used as sources of titles of books and magazine articles pertaining to the

¹Walter Petty, "Critical Reading in the Primary Grades," Elementary English, XXXIII (May, 1956), pp. 298-300.

²Kansas Studies in Education, "Reading Skills and Methods of Teaching Them," Reading in the Secondary Schools (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1961), p. 241.

writer's topic which can be read by the student and then used as a basis for comparison. Exercises to be used in the classroom include: students gather information about some of the writers of their textbooks using various kinds of references; students are given certain topics and then asked what the qualifications of the writer might be, such as "Which writer would you expect to give the most helpful information about how to practice different baseball pitches?" Is the answer "a man who has been a sportswriter for ten years," or "a former pitcher who now coaches?"¹

Teachers can further develop critical thinking by reading portions of stories and having students rewrite the endings, explaining reasons for any changes. The NEA Journal usually contains an "unfinished story" which can be used successfully in the intermediate grades to develop critical thinking, particularly when students explain why they feel as they do.

The "cloze method" can be used as a technique for teaching critical reading at all levels. Teachers construct exercises by deleting certain words in some regular manner from a verbal passage and substitute underlined blank spaces. The individual responding to the cloze text or exercise is

¹Paul McKee, Reading: A Program of Instruction for the Elementary School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), pp. 398-402.

asked to fill in the word which belongs in the blank space.¹

There are several different types of questions which teachers may ask to stimulate critical thinking and critical reading in classroom activities. The questioning technique depends upon the purposes the teacher has in mind. If the purpose is knowledge analysis, an explanatory question is called for, such as: "Why do you think the South was justly irritated with the Abolitionists? What conclusions would you draw from the author's argument?"² The student's reaction should involve reasoning and exercising judgment to obtain the answer. Not only must the student remember and organize material, but he must also make inferences and seek causes and effects. He must tell why he thinks as he does.³ To answer an explanatory question, a student should ask himself the following questions: "Why did these things happen? Which way is best? What other alternatives might exist? How valid is this author's argument?"

The teacher should use heuristic questions when the purpose is to stimulate creative thought. When using such

¹J. Wesley Schneyer, "Use of the Cloze Procedure for Improving Reading Comprehension," The Reading Teacher, XIX (December, 1965), p. 174.

²Jack R. Fraenkel, "Ask the Right Questions," The Clearing House, XL (March, 1966), p. 398.

³Ibid.

questions, the teacher must remember that no answer is more acceptable than another. Divergent thinking is required of the student to answer such questions as, "If you were inventing a language for Martians, where would you begin? What kind of world might exist if there were no sound?" Classroom activities centered around this type of question will stretch both the student's imagination and intellect.¹

Propaganda Devices Found in Reading Materials

Many magazine articles, books, and advertising materials contain propaganda devices which often tend to stir the reader to action. He should stop and consider what he has read more carefully because these are designed to sway opinions or sell some particular idea or product. The student should be aware that rapid reading of the main idea often leads to false conclusions. To apply techniques of critical reading, the student should go back and consider carefully what he knows about the source of the reading material and the possible biases or hidden motives which its publisher or author might have had. He should watch the reading material for faulty logic and for false comparisons. Particularly important is an awareness of emotionally loaded

¹Jack R. Fraenkel, "Ask the Right Questions," The Clearing House, XL (March, 1966), p. 398.

words which appeal to basic feelings and try to stir up strong attitudes for or against something. With experience, a student can learn to spot some of these types of appeals through a quick scanning for the clues the author provides. The student can then be aware of these techniques before he begins to read. In any reading the student should frequently ask himself, "What is the author trying to make me believe and why?"

One of the propagandist's most usual techniques is that of using disagreeable words to arouse fear, hate, or disapproval, without giving any evidence to support the point he is making. Because these words are used for things which are not liked, the reader attaches the bad meaning to the person or thing the propagandist wants the reader to hate or despise.¹ An example of the "bad name" technique is the advertisement for a weight lifting device. The "before" picture shows a muscular man kicking sand into the face of a beautiful girl accompanied by a small, thin man. The "after" picture shows the second man, just as muscular as the first, pushing the bully into the water. The caption: "Why be a WEAKLING?"

An opposite technique often used is the "glad name" technique. Pleasant words are used so that a halo of desir-

¹Mila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 272.

able associations are built around a person or thing to such an extent that the reader is moved to like, respect, or desire it.¹ The purpose of this device is to make the reader accept or approve something without examining the evidence. This is often seen in advertisements for beauty aids. "Use this product if you want a "new, more beautiful" complexion.

The "transfer" technique is used when the propagandist wants the reader to transfer his respect, admiration, or reverence from something to which he has already attached one of these to something else. By putting these two things together, he hopes to sell his product or idea.² This technique is frequently used in television commercials where movie stars are seen holding a certain product. A magazine advertisement for fishing lures may contain a picture of a man holding a string of large fish. The reader is lead to believe that by using the product advertised, he will be able to identify with the picture. This method is similar to the "testimonial" where the noted person says that he uses or likes the object of the propaganda.³ It may or may not be true that they actually use or have used the product.

¹Mila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 273.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 275.

The "plain folks" technique is used to win the reader's confidence. Admiration of the humble, common man is an American tradition.¹ Most readers identify with the ordinary man and it is the propagandist's motive to present products, people, and ideas in this image. When the President is pictured walking his two pet beagles, it is hoped that the readers will develop a deep admiration for him as a common man.

The "band wagon" technique is used to get the reader to follow the crowd just because "everyone else is doing it".² This particularly appeals to students because they don't like to be different. The theory is that if everybody believes a certain thing, or likes a certain product, the reader should unquestioningly accept it. An example of this technique, "Red Dot sneakers outsell all other brands", should influence the reader to join the "band wagon" and unless the student critically examines the facts, he is apt to be persuaded.

The most subtle and one of the most dangerous techniques used by propagandists is "card stacking". With this technique the propagandist does not give all the facts, or he may direct the reader's attention to a particular detail

¹ Nila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 274.

² Ibid.

and ignore other details.¹ He can't lose because he has presented only what he wanted to present. He glorifies points which might favorably influence the reader but misrepresents, or omits, those that would do the opposite. For example, an advertisement might state that a product is "better, lasts longer, and costs less" but fails to state the object with which the product is being compared.

As students collect advertisements and examine them, the teacher should lead discussions on the following points:

- (1) To whom is the advertisement addressed?
- (2) To what need or desire does it appeal (health, popularity, comfort, security, etc.)?
- (3) What claims are not substantiated?
- (4) What attention getting devices are used?
- (5) How is actual cost disguised or minimized ("costs only a few pennies a day")?
- (6) Why are "testimonials" used?
- (7) What words or ideas are used to create a particular impression?
- (8) What evidence do we want from advertisements?
- (9) Are facts presented or does it merely present the author's opinion?²

¹Nila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 275.

²Ruth K. Flamond, "Critical Reading," New Perspectives in Reading Instruction (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 260.

Critical Reading and the Basic Readers

Well prepared teacher's manuals have been provided by many companies producing basic readers which offer systematic guidance in the development of essential thinking skills. However, non-use and misuse of these materials are responsible for the unfavorable practices that nurture inaccurate and purposeless reading skills. Before selecting a basal reading series for a school system, the teachers and curriculum director should ask themselves these questions: "Do the material and the teaching stir the imagination of the reader? Do they leave something for the reader to do? Do they open up alternative, inviting avenues that would suggest divergent thinking? Do they carry the reader logically forward step by step to an inevitable conclusion? Do they challenge beliefs and call for proof of facts and arguments?"¹ If the answer is "Yes" to these questions, the basic reading series can be used to stimulate critical thinking and critical reading.

Gertrude Williams examined ten series of basic readers and found suggestions for teaching thirty-three different critical reading skills. Making inferences, making judgments, and perceiving relationships were the only critical reading skills that appeared in all ten series. Critical thinking,

¹Russell G. Stauffer, "Productive Reading--Thinking at the First Grade Level," The Reading Teacher, XIII (February, 1960), p. 183.

an essential reasoning ability, was listed in only one basic series. The largest number of critical skills found in a single series was twenty-four and the smallest number was eleven. (Williams included interpretive skills as well as evaluative critical reading skills in her study.) Twenty-one of the total thirty-three skills were developed on all reading levels from preprimer through grade six. All ten sets did have some provisions for developing the fundamental reasoning abilities acquired for active thinkers, however.¹ The different skills taught and the level at which these skills are taught indicates that there is some disagreement among educators concerning the critical reading skills that should be taught at the elementary grade level.

Tests of Critical Language Usage

Achievement tests fail to measure accurately progress in critical language skills and diagnosis of difficulties is not an easy task for many teachers. This is pointed out in a study by Gans in which she found that children performed poorly on a test of critical reading after scoring well on the usual standardized tests in reading.² At

¹Gertrude Williams, "Provisions for Critical Reading in Basic Readers," Elementary English, XXXVI (May, 1959), p. 328-30.

²Roma Gans, "An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking," as cited by John DeBoer, "Teaching Critical Reading," The Elementary English Review, XXIII (October, 1946), p. 252.

the present time teacher-made tests are perhaps the best method of determining which skills need to be emphasized in the classroom. Each content field requires specific skills. An example of this would be a teacher-made test designed to measure critical reading in social studies. The test would include (1) skillful analysis of propaganda, (2) differentiation of fact from opinion, (3) perceptive "reading between the lines", and (4) interpretation of the metaphors or allusions characteristic of many social studies tests.¹ The lack of these skills suggests the need for more instruction in developing more depth in the reading of social studies.

Very few standardized tests exist in the area of critical language usage. The tests that have been constructed aim to isolate the various abilities and diagnose their presence or absence in particular individuals or groups. Most of the tests constructed have been of the paper-and-pencil variety and this factor limits the validity of the measures. At the present time, there is little agreement on what items should be included in these tests and some doubt about the comprehensiveness of them. The greatest lack is not that of agreement on subtests but of material suitable for younger children.

¹Melvin L. Michaels, "Subject Reading Improvement: A Neglected Teaching Responsibility," Journal of Reading, IX (October, 1965), p. 20.

A test which could be used in grades four, five, and six is The Ohio Thinking Check-Up constructed by L. E. Rath (Department of Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1944). The test emphasizes the interpretation of data and consists of twelve paragraphs followed by questions to be answered by true, false, or uncertain. The decoy answers were originally arranged to test such errors as interpreting through personal judgment, evading the issue by "name calling", believing a superstition, and generalizing from insufficient evidence.¹

Another test which could be used in the upper grades is The Revised Stanford-Binet Tests of Intelligence, from Intelligence by Lewis M. Terman and Maud A. Merrill (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937). This test predicts children's ability in critical thinking. It includes definitions, picture completion, finding reasons, and problem situations such as the ball-and-field test. The absurdities tests probably come closest to predicting children's ability in critical thinking, but research is needed on the interrelationships of the various tests.²

The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal test can be used in grades nine to sixteen and with adults.

¹David H. Russell, Children's Thinking (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1956), pp. 289-91.

²Ibid.

It was constructed by Goodwin Watson and Edward M. Glaser (Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.) and is often used for selection purposes in schools and for research on the effects of instructional procedures on critical thinking. Five subtests are employed to evaluate the capacity of the individual to draw correct inferences, recognize assumptions, draw appropriate deductions, interpret data, and evaluate arguments.¹

Research in Critical Language Usage

In the Harvard report on reading in elementary schools, it was found that more than half of the school systems indicated that "little" or "no" time was devoted to the development of critical reading skills in the first and second grades. At the third and fourth grade levels 29 per cent of the systems reported that "little" or "no" instructional time was given to them.²

Critical language usage is dependent upon the teacher and her ability to produce critical thinking in her students. Wolf and Ellinger found that the number of critical responses to questions asked by the teacher was increased through the

¹Oscar Krisen Buros, (ed.), The Fifth Mental Measurements Yearbook (Highland Park, New Jersey: The Gryphon Press, 1959), pp. 700-701.

²Mary C. Austin and Coleman Morrison, The First R (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 40.

use of special lesson plans. Some types of questions were found to be more effective than others in eliciting critical responses. Applying-evaluating questions elicited the highest number of responses, and gathering information the lowest number. Teachers who obtained critical responses established a background of information early in the lesson. Also, teachers who were successful in obtaining a high number of critical responses seemed to have established a climate in their classrooms which encouraged critical questioning. The students were not afraid to disagree with either the teacher or the textbook as long as they could make evaluative statements and substantiate them with the criteria used in making judgments.¹

In an experiment using upper grade elementary children, Hiram found that correct or logical thinking does depend upon a knowledge of the principles of logic. According to his experiment, upper grade pupils can be taught to think critically and, therefore, logically through the use of instructional procedures which emphasize the principles of logic as the learning content.² Critical thinking, like the ability to read, spell, write and use numbers, is a tool

¹Willavene Wolf and Bernice D. Ellinger, "Teaching Critical Reading: An Observational Study," Critical Reading (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1957), p. 443.

²George H. Hiram, "An Experiment in Developing Critical Thinking in Children," Journal of Experimental Education, XXVI (December, 1957), pp. 125-32.

skill. As such, it cannot be left to develop only through incidental learning experiences.

Shores and Saupe attempted to determine the relationship between a reading test devised for problem-solving in a particular content field, science, with other reading tests and tests of general ability. The tests used for the study included: The Test of Reading for Problem-solving in Science; New California Short-form Test of Mental Maturity, Primary or Elementary Battery, '47 S-form; and, Progressive Achievement Tests, Primary or Elementary Battery, Form A. Shores and Saupe found that all the tests used, including the Science Reading test, measured general reading ability to a certain extent. However, the ability to read the type of problems found in science is more independent of mental age than is general reading ability and differs from whatever is measured in tests of general verbal intelligence and general reading ability. Since the Science Reading test correlated lower with chronological age than the other tests used, Shores and Saupe felt that the critical language skills needed for problem-solving in science had not been directly and sequentially taught in the schools involved in the study. They further predicted that when the Science Reading test is perfected and reading tests in other content fields are devised, researchers will find that general reading ability

differentiates into specific abilities to read different kinds of material for different purposes.¹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Due to the type of this report, certain limitations were inherent in the conclusions. Valid conclusions were difficult to make because of discrepancies in the research data. In view of the constant changes in the findings of research, the conclusions are tentative and restricted to this report.

Critical language usage is an intelligent process that proceeds from simple reasoning to complex analysis in a series of logical steps. It involves evaluation and judgment based on background experiences, knowledge, and reasoning ability.

Students need to know how to apply the skills of critical language usage because today's youth are often confronted with many controversial issues through mass communication. Much of what is learned comes to individuals secondhand with someone else's beliefs and biases. Once a student has obtained these skills, he can use them to further his education on his own.

Children do not learn to think and react critically without training. They need to develop skill in distinguish-

¹Harlan J. Shores and J. L. Saupe, "Reading for Problem-Solving in Science," Journal of Educational Psychology, XLIV (March, 1953), pp. 149-58.

ing fact from opinion, comparing and contrasting ideas, evaluating relevancy and adequacy of material, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and evaluating conclusions.

The skills for critical language usage should increase in complexity as the student advances from one level to another. Sequential development and continuity should be considered when a program for development of such skills is planned.

Factors which influence students to read and think critically include intelligence, social class, age, sex, moral and ethical values, creativity, fluency and flexibility in both reading and thinking, freedom from biases and prejudices, a broad background of experiences, knowledge, and a legitimate purpose for engaging in critical reading and critical thinking.

Each content area requires specific critical language skills. Classroom teachers need to know what critical language skills are needed in each particular area and how to develop such skills within their students so that they may develop mentally to the greatest possible extent.

Children do not learn to use critical language skills automatically. Instruction in such skills should begin in the primary grades during the reading period of beginning reading instruction when children are encouraged to respond to the foundations that must be laid for critical reading. A continuous, sequential, developmental program should be found in all schools from kindergarten to grade twelve.

The teacher must be able to use critical language skills himself, value an inquiring mind, and foster the kinds of discussions which reflect differing views. He should use explanatory questions when he wants the students to apply reasoning skills and exercise judgment. Heuristic questions should be used to stimulate creative thought.

Students should be made aware of propagandists' techniques. The techniques most frequently found are (1) "bad name" technique, (2) "glad name" technique, (3) "transfer" technique, (4) "testimonial" technique, (5) "plain folks" technique, (6) "band wagon" technique, and (7) the "card stacking" technique.

When a teacher uses a reading textbook without taking advantage of the excellent guidance offered in the accompanying manual, haphazard reading habits are apt to be the result. Basal reading series differ in the type of critical language skills included and the grade level at which these skills are taught. Most series, however, include making judgments, making inferences, and perceiving relationships. Perhaps, with emphasis placed on critical language skills by reading authorities, basal reading series will include more of these skills in the future.

The three methods presently used to teach critical language skills are the direct approach, the incidental approach, and the functional approach. These are taught either in group situations or individualized settings.

There still exists confusion and lack of emphasis in teaching the skills associated with critical language usage. This is probably because few college teacher-preparation courses are teaching how to develop critical language skills and teachers have not learned to think and read critically themselves. Because of the complex aspects of critical language skills systematic, sequential instruction frequently is not provided. Some school systems also avoid topics of a controversial nature even though they would challenge students.

Many teachers feel that it is easier to wait until the intermediate grades to develop skills because basic readers emphasize them at this level and application of critical skills can be done at this level in the content fields. Some teachers still believe that the mechanics of reading should be emphasized in the primary grades and that children are not mature enough at this age to do critical thinking. Perhaps, this is because of the misunderstanding of what critical reading and critical thinking actually involve.

Most standardized reading tests measure ability in literal comprehension skills rather than critical language skills. At the present time, there are no standardized critical reading tests available in all content areas. Since critical reading differs from general reading ability, more research needs to be done in this area and a com-

prehensive, valid, standardized test needs to be devised for use at all elementary grade levels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

- Austin, Mary C. and Coleman Morrison. The First R. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963.
- Bamman, Henry A., Ursula Hogan, and Charles E. Green. Reading Instruction in the Secondary Schools. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1967.
- Bond, Guy L. and Eva Bond Wagner. Teaching the Child to Read. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966.
- Buros, Oscar Krisen (ed.). The Fifth Mental Measurements Yearbook. Highland Park, New Jersey: The Gryphon Press, 1959.
- Carter, Homer L. J. and Dorothy J. McGinnis. Teaching Individuals to Read. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1962.
- Center, Stella S. The Art of Book Reading. New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1952.
- Cutts, Warren G. Modern Reading Instruction. Washington, D. C.: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964.
- Dechant, Emerald V. Improving the Teaching of Reading. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964.
- Durrell, Donald D. Improving Reading Instruction. New York: The World Book Company, 1956.
- King, Martha L., Bernice D. Ellinger, and Willavene Wolf. Critical Reading. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967.
- Mazurkiewicz, Albert J. (ed.). New Perspectives in Reading Instruction. New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964.
- McKee, Paul Gordon. Reading: A Program of Instruction for the Elementary School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.
- McKim, Margaret G. Guiding Growth in Reading. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1955.

- Robinson, H. Alan (ed.). Recent Developments in Reading. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Russell, David H. Children's Thinking. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1956.
- Smith, Mila Banton. Reading Instruction for Today's Children. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.
- Strang, Ruth M. and Dorothy Kendall Bracken. Making Better Readers. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1957.
- Van Riper, Charles and Katharine G. Butler. Speech in the Classroom. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1955.
- Weiss, M. Jerry. Reading in the Secondary Schools. New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1961.

B. PERIODICALS

- Aaron, I. E. "Developing Reading Competencies Through Social Studies and Literature," Reading as an Intellectual Activity, XIII (New York: Scholastic Magazines, 1963).
- Artley, A. Sterl. "Critical Reading in the Content Areas," Elementary English, XLI (February, 1959).
- Barbe, Walter B. and Thelma E. Williams. "Developing Creative Thinking in Gifted Children Through the Reading Program," The Reading Teacher, XV (December, 1961).
- Betts, Emmett A. "Guidance in the Critical Interpretation of Language," Elementary English, XXVII (January, 1950).
- Covinton, Martin V. "Some Experimental Evidence on Teaching Creative Understanding," The Reading Teacher, XXI (September, 1967).
- Crisuolo, Nicholas P. "A Plea for Critical Reading in the Primary Grades," Peabody Journal of Education, XLI (September, 1965).
- Crossen, Helen J. "Effects of the Attitudes of the Reader Upon Critical Reading Ability," Journal of Educational Research, XLII (December, 1948).

- DeBoer, John J. "Teaching Critical Reading," The Elementary English Review, XXIII (October, 1946).
- Denberg, Robert and Charles Jones. "Critical Reading in A Developmental Reading Course," Journal of Reading, X (March, 1967).
- Durrell, Donald D. and J. Richard Chambers. "Research in Thinking Abilities Related to Reading," The Reading Teacher, XII (December, 1958).
- Eller, William and Judith Goldman Wolf. "Developing Critical Reading Abilities," Journal of Reading, X (December, 1966).
- Flanigan, Michael C. "Semantics and Critical Reading," English Journal, LV (September, 1966).
- Fraenkel, Jack R. "Ask the Right Questions," The Clearing House, XL (March, 1966).
- Gainsburg, Joseph C. "Critical Reading is Creative Reading and Needs Creative Teaching," The Reading Teacher, XV (December, 1961).
- Groff, Patrick J. "Children's Attitudes Toward Reading and Their Critical Reading Abilities in Four Content-Type Materials," Journal of Educational Research, LV (April, 1962).
- Guilford, J. P. "Frontiers in Thinking that Teachers Should Know About," The Reading Teacher, XIII (February, 1960).
- Hester, Kathleen B. "Creative Reading: A Neglected Area," Education, LXXIX (May, 1959).
- Hill, Jeraldine. "Teaching Critical Reading in the Middle Grades," Elementary English, XXXIX (March, 1962).
- Hyram, George H. "An Experiment in Developing Critical Thinking in Children," Journal of Experimental Education, XXVI (December, 1957).
- Kemp, C. Gratton. "Improvement of Critical Thinking in Relation to Open-Closed Belief System," The Journal of Experimental Education, XXI (March, 1963).
- Lackey, George H. Jr. and Doris Rollins. "History and Current Events: A Time and Place for Critical Reading," Journal of Reading, VIII (May, 1965).

The purpose of this report was to determine (1) the importance and nature of critical language usage, (2) methods used in teaching critical reading, critical thinking, and critical listening, (3) factors which predispose students to use critical language skills and the qualifications of teachers enabling them to teach such skills, (4) skills for critical language usage found in the public school at the present time, and (5) the difficulties to be avoided when applying critical language skills.

The study was limited to the elementary grades with emphasis on critical reading. Information for this report was restricted to library research.

Students need to know how to apply the skills of critical language usage because today's youth are often confronted with many controversial issues through mass communication. Much of what is learned comes to the reader secondhand with someone else's beliefs and biases. Once a student has obtained these skills, he can use them to further his education on his own.

Many differences in the definitions of critical reading, critical thinking and critical listening were cited by the various authors. These definitions differed in complexity of thought processes involved and the skills needed by the individual but the element of evaluation was common to them all.

The three methods presently used to teach critical language skills are the direct approach, the incidental approach, and the functional approach. These are taught either in group situations or individualized settings.

Factors which predispose students to read critically include a broad background of experience, perception, an open mind, creativity, fluency and flexibility in both reading and thinking, a set of values, and knowledge (of facts, organizing study, trends, sequences, and criteria for judging).

The teacher must be able to use critical language skills himself. He must know the students' backgrounds and provide materials and experiences for them so that they may develop these critical skills.

Various critical language skills are found in public schools, depending upon the basic reading series used and the teacher. Most basic reading series include these three skills: making inferences, making judgments, and perceiving relationships.

Students should be made aware of propagandists' techniques. The techniques most frequently found are (1) "bad name" technique, (2) "glad name" technique, (3) "transfer" technique, (4) "testimonial" technique, (5) "plain folks" technique, (6) "band wagon" technique, and (7) the "card stacking" technique.

Writers stressed that more emphasis should be placed on critical language usage in the elementary school, particularly in the primary grades. More research needs to be done in this area and a comprehensive, valid, standardized test needs to be devised for use at all elementary grade levels.